



THE CORPORATE EMPEROR™

You are probably all familiar with some version of the Hans Christian Andersen story, The Emperor's New Clothes; it has been translated into 100 different languages and is read across the globe. In case not, grab a coffee, and I'll summarise here for you:



An Emperor lives a privileged life and spends lavishly on clothing and personal desires, at the expense of his subjects. Two swindlers arrive and, posing as weavers, offer to supply him with magnificent clothes ... telling him that they are invisible to those who are stupid or incompetent.

The Emperor hires them and takes his officials to show off his decision; they see that the looms are empty, but pretend to see the magnificence, to avoid looking foolish or being berated by the Emperor. They go so far as to report back that the suit is finished, mime dressing him and encouraging him to lead a procession through town. Everyone around him goes along with this idea, although uncomfortable, through either fear or not wanting to appear inept or stupid. It takes a small child, as yet untainted by these fears, to shout out that he is, in fact, wearing no clothes at all! This allows all others the freedom of admitting what they know to be true, even though the Emperor continues, prouder than ever that he is still the smartest.

Some years ago, after reading this story to my daughter, I started to recognise this Emperor in some of the leaders I saw across organisations:

- I have witnessed leaders who held such self-belief that they had ceased to seek the input from others, even those who were paid to advise, sometimes demonstrating an arrogance but at other times through a mistaken belief that they must be seen to know everything or appear inept



- I have seen those around them agree with risky decisions, telling me it was out of fear of reprisal or ridicule; only to privately ridicule those same decisions or be held accountable, further down the line
- I have even, occasionally, seen those who may be considered to have a 'small voice' in the corporate world, call out those decisions and hold others to account, often then starting a wave of agreement across organisations – even if it didn't always change the 'Emperor's' mind!

These similarities fascinated me and so began many years of research and observation, aimed at determining why we might become 'Emperors', when, in our career path, this happens, and why we allow it to continue, when there is real risk to organisational and personal growth.

I faced the realism that I have also had moments where, perhaps, I wandered into the risky territory of becoming a Corporate Emperor™; when my passion for a topic did not allow for others to challenge through fear of dampening my enthusiasm, or where I became so focused that I forgot to ask others what they thought. I also realised that others have previously thought about the same comparisons and started to share great examples. So, I was then spurred on to listen to every story I could, observe dozens of meetings and share ideas to try and understand why. If this is something we are all somehow aware of, and all being impacted by, why we are still seeing leaders in place who demonstrate either a level of narcissism and control, or lack of self-awareness, without discernible challenge? This has led to a period of research, across diverse industries, organisations, and cultures, to determine what drives us to continue to 'enable' this behaviour, how do we identify the traits, and how do we gain the confidence to speak up when it is demonstrated.

I now share my findings, and a series of tools and techniques, with organisations with the aim of supporting:

- **Recruitment and Talent Attraction;** reducing unconscious bias and recognising the full range of skills and behaviours that organisations need to thrive
- **Attrition:** recognising red flags of behaviour that negatively impact engagement, motivation and performance
- **Innovation;** increasing confidence amongst expert teams and creating environments of psychological safety



- **Development of authentic, leadership skills;** identifying when and why Emperors are created – and understanding the development needed to reduce the impact
- **Performance and Motivation;** supporting organisations to recognise the damaging impact of keeping an Emperor in your team, and ways to support their development

JOIN THE REVOLUTION You can take part in a global survey, results to be published and your organisation can be credited in this, and future, publications. Plus, you will be amongst the first to receive the results ... and the toolkit.

If you would like to join this revolution – please contact me for more information and let's start bringing out our inner 'authentic child' in the workplace.

by Carol Martin - Director

Email: carol@cameron-rees.co.uk

www.cameron-rees.co.uk

